

Final Report
on the
**Northeast
Caprine and Ovine
Genetics Marketing
Program**

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and  
Representatives of the Northeast's  
Sheep and Goat Industry

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Background/introduction

In 1999, seven states from the Northeast began working together to develop an infrastructure for collecting and marketing high quality caprine and ovine genetics. Small ruminant producers in New Jersey joined in the efforts in 2000. In August, industry representative from each participating state held a conference to begin this task.

Accomplishment of Goals:

Goal A. To increase the revenue of small goat and sheep farmers in the northeast.

Because of the efforts of the Northeast Sheep and Goat Genetics Alliance, formed in January 2000 as a result of funding assistance through the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, many farmers in the region who raise sheep and goats have gained a new awareness of the importance high quality, healthy genetics. The small ruminant database developed in the spring of 2001 has served as a source of breeders that others can contact to obtain not only semen and breeding stock, but also information and advice on raising healthy stock. Alliance members have been in communication with breeders in the U.S. and overseas about the purchase of sheep and goats.

The Alliance's commitment to quality livestock has allowed the group to serve as an advisor for newcomers to the livestock industry who had previously purchased animals with health problems. The guidance that the Alliance has been able to extend to these individuals will empower more potential breeders to stay with small ruminants when they might have become discouraged and given up on their farming enterprises.

While the Alliance does not currently have the resources to quantify the increase in revenues to small ruminant farmers, the group is encouraged by the new level of awareness for good genetics, and the response from farmers to this much needed resource network.

Goal B. To increase the number of northeastern goat and sheep farmers who can offer genetic products to U.S. and overseas markets through an organized, cooperative program of New York, New Jersey and the New England states.

Through its database, workshops and website, the Alliance has been in contact with over 3,000 individual farms and farming enterprises in the Northeast. Breeders whose sheep and goat can meet the Alliance's high health standards are seeing an increase in inquiries and sales. Of particular

importance is the Alliance's stance on the federal Scrapie program. Several Alliance Board members also serve on their state Scrapie program boards and are knowledgeable about the program. The Alliance has worked closely with members of the USDA Animal-Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to improve the image of the federal program and to encourage breeders to join. Foreign customers are becoming more aware of the value of this federal program and are demanding participation before accepting imported stock. The alliance has been an industry leader in participation in the program, which will be gaining in importance because of the new interstate transport rules.

Objectives:

1. Complete and develop detailed database of goat and sheep farmers in the region.

The Alliance database was drawn from many sheep registries and organizations, as well as the American Dairy Goat Association. Using the database, it is possible to target either sheep or goat producers, and to disseminate information to specific audiences. The database is very adaptable, and includes over 2500 small ruminant producers.

2. Increase technical assistance to goat and sheep farmers in all eight of the Northeastern states by offering workshops and training materials developed by experts in the field.

The Alliance is known to small ruminant producers throughout the Northeast as a source of health and marketing information, demonstrated by the regular letters, e-mail messages and telephone calls to the board members.

In July, the Alliance sponsored a workshop in West Springfield, Massachusetts, in conjunction with the New England Sheep Show and Sale. Workshop planners contacted an Ontario sheep breeder, Mr. William Duffield in early January 2001 to identify general small ruminant needs of the Canadian market. Duffield, who is considered to be on the "cutting edge" of sheep breeding technology, has raised Suffolk sheep for 35 years and is well respected in the international sheep community. Duffield has imported sheep from the US, and also exported to the U.S. and other countries worldwide.

Duffield expressed the opinion that the Canadian market was looking for small ruminants with production records and the highest available health standards. The Canadian commitment to small ruminant

health is evident in the Ontario Sheep Program, which is more stringent and precise than the prevailing health or production programs in the U.S. Some industry experts suggest that most U.S. producers typically have little in depth knowledge about computerized production data or the ramifications and requirements of a total health system.

Consequently, a program for the workshop was developed which would reflect Canadian criteria for high health standards and production data. Since both sheep and goats are included in the term “small ruminants”, a dual program was planned which would meet the unique needs of both species. A roster of speakers reflecting the needs of the Canadian market was carefully selected, as follows:

Mr. William Duffield

Mr. Duffield is the owner/operator of Codan Farms, a leading Suffolk sheep operation in Ontario. He has done a great deal of exporting to the U.S. and other countries in his 35 years of raising Suffolk sheep. Mr. Duffield has also been a leader in farm bio-security and in technological advances such as Artificial Insemination of sheep.

The workshop was built around Duffield's expertise and commitment to health and production data. He discussed farm bio-security, introducing concepts that are seldom implemented in this country, but which are becoming more common with the spread of foot and mouth in Europe. Duffield also spoke about his production data system, *LambPlan*, which gives much useful production information to breeders so they can make the best choices for breeding stock based on their individual markets. He also summarized the regulatory requirements of exporting sheep and goat livestock and genetic materials into Canada and highlighted the needs of the Canadian market, including guidance on how U.S. producers could meet these requirements.

Dr. Diane Sutton, DVM, USDA, APHIS

Dr. Sutton is responsible for the Federal Scrapie Certification Program, and the new Interstate Transport Rules for Sheep and Goats. There has been significant confusion about these two programs and how they apply to U.S. producers. Also, the Scrapie program has ramifications for export to all countries, including Canada, which has undertaken aggressive efforts to eradicate the disease.

Dr. Sutton shared Mr. Duffield's concerns about Scrapie, which is a disease with a long incubation period and symptoms that can be confusing. Scrapie in the US, while not widely spread, is causing a huge disruption in export programs and many countries are refusing to accept US sheep and goats because of the disease.

Dr. George Wiggans, AILP, USDA

Dr. Wiggans is a noted and respected expert in Dairy Herd Improvement (DHI), which is a system using production data to measure and increase the output of milk in herds, in this case, dairy goat herds. Because the Canadian market is seeking animals with proven production numbers, Dr. Wiggans' presentation was very appropriate. The typical U.S. dairy goat producer vaguely understands the DHI system, but few are currently implementing its principles. The Canadian market has imported many dairy goats from the U.S. in the past and continues to desire U.S. genetics, but production data is very important to this market. Dr. Wiggans gave not only scientific information about DHI and how it works, but he also touched upon the practical, daily aspects of implementing DHI principles on the farms. Disseminating this information to producers is vital if they are to have a working knowledge of this proven production system.

Alan Culham, NSIP

Mr. Culham is the industry leader in the National Sheep Improvement Program, (NSIP). He has been associated with this production system since its inception and is firmly committed to it as a way to choose better stock and to improve the profitability of sheep operations. Since the Canadian market is seeking production numbers and looking to produce more meat from the same number of animals, Mr. Culham's presentation was both timely and important, illustrating how NSIP had changed his productivity. Unfortunately U.S. producers typically have a vague idea of the workings of NSIP, and few have embraced the system to date. Since NSIP does not recognize any international borders, its principles are utilized in Canada as well as the US.

There are similarities as well as differences between the programs that Mr. Culham and Mr. Duffield use in their flocks, but the principles are the same and both were enthusiastic about encouraging workshop attendees to begin the process of applying production numbers to their

livestock. The Canadian sheep market is looking for production numbers before committing to purchases from the US.

Mr. René DeLeeuw

Mr. DeLeeuw is the head herdsman for Coach Farm in Pine Plains, New York. Coach Farm is among the largest goat dairies in the northeast, with more than 1000+ milking does. Coach Farm is a successful operation, which has exported, does, bucks and semen to many countries, including Canada. Mr. DeLeeuw was able to give direct information on how the dairy uses DHI principles and also to give insights into what the export market, particularly Canada, needs and desires by way of U.S. genetics.

Mr. DeLeeuw supported Dr. Wiggans' comments and suggestions about DHI and explained how using the system had increased milk production and made the dairy's genetics more valuable for export. Industry leaders world wide, including Canada, are increasingly stressing these important traits.

Dr. Thomas Settlemyre, PhD Biochemistry, Professor at Bowdoin College

Dr. Settlemyre is known throughout the U.S. and Canada as an industry leader in sheep health and production. Currently he is working on a system of crossbreeding selected breeds of sheep to produce a more disease and parasite resistant animal. Since internal parasites and diseases take a huge toll on the sheep industries of all countries, his research in these areas is valuable. His program will involve 5 years of careful selection and breeding, but he is hopeful of producing a sheep that will meet the needs of worldwide markets. His goal is a sheep that will be large and meaty but will be resistant to common parasites and diseases. The ramifications for export of this animal to all countries, especially Canada, which shares the same health and production problems as the U.S., is extremely great.

The workshop was well attended by sheep and goat breeders alike. Feedback from attendees, and those who heard about the event, has been positive, and has sparked interest and awareness in exports, particularly to Canada, which is near enough to make exporting practical. Also, it is evident that the U.S. has genetics of value to the Canadian market. Workshop attendees received health and production information prepared for the event and not previously available. The information will likely have a ripple effect as producers

make the changes in their operations in order to tap the Canadian export market.

3. Develop a semen collection program throughout the region based on animal health protocols, both domestically and internationally.

The goal of the Alliance, to increase sales of sheep and goat genetics by Northeastern farmers is being met daily. As inquiries are processed and sales occur, the Alliance's reputation will take on an additional "value-added" connotation, encouraging the participation of more farms.

4. Develop the Internet site, to include information of the region's genetic materials inventory and promote sales.

The Alliance's website is fully operational. Sample "pages" are attached to this report.

C. Goal: Increase the sales of goat and sheep genetics by northeastern farmers.

This goal is being met daily. Inquiries are first processed by the Executive Secretary of the Alliance, and numerous sales have occurred or are pending. The Alliance recently developed a brochure, printed in both English and Spanish, to further this goal.

Objectives:

1. Publicize the availability of the Northeast genetic Internet site to potential buyers throughout the world through advertising, trade publications, USDA Agricultural Trade Offices and direct mail to prospective buyers identified by AgExport Services.

Articles about the Alliance have been printed in several regional trade publications, giving the organization substantial exposure.

2. Make connections with potential buyers through associations, genetics exporters, trade shows, seminars, and state agriculture departments.

In addition to the Canada marketing workshop described above, two Alliance members were able to participate in a trade mission to Taiwan, and a significant sale of dairy goats to Israel is pending.

The Alliance's Executive Secretary has spoken at several local meetings and the Alliance has had a presence at the New England Sheep Show and Sale, the Massachusetts Sheep and Wool Festival, the American Dairy Goat Association's National Show and Sale, the Central New York Fiber Festival and the Eastern States Exposition's Sheep and Goat Shows, as well as several other events.